

4/14/21 Remarks from Rep. Scott Peters for T&I Member Day

Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

Thank you for hosting “Member Day” for your colleagues like me to share our requests and priorities for the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization.

I’m here to highlight two issues that affect my district and the country as a whole, including

1. issues of public transportation, density, and housing; and
2. improving Amtrak for Southern California.

First, I would like to stress the importance of investing in public transportation that prioritizes decongesting our roads, increases sustainability, and supports regional housing planning.

I urge the Committee to continue to improve transit infrastructure to encourage more commuters to take public transportation and reduce vehicle miles traveled. The federal government can only support a limited number of projects. We must prioritize projects that will generate the ridership that will demonstrably offer automobile alternatives and minimize greenhouse gas emissions.

To this end, we need to ask local and state governments, in exchange for the massive federal transit investments we make in local communities, to commit to increasing density and building more housing along transit corridors. Large and small cities across the country, and across California, struggle to build enough housing and keep rents affordable for families. Between 2005 and 2014, California built a little more than 300 new homes for every 1,000 new residents.

This week, I reintroduced the Build More Housing Near Transit Act, which would help incentivize a more thoughtful approach to building new housing during the construction of large transit projects.

My bipartisan bill modifies the Capital Investment Grants program to fast track applications that conduct a housing feasibility assessment, to determine how and where housing units could be built near new transit stops.

It also provides a scoring boost to projects that can demonstrate a local commitment to changing land use policies to accommodate market-rate and affordable housing.

This bill is important because it shifts the discussion of land use policy to the beginning of the conversation. The federal government can spur livable, sustainable communities, and it’s our responsibility to the taxpayer to make sure we maximize their investment.

The bill is supported by a wide array of organizations, including Transportation For America, the American Planning Association, Smart Growth America, Up For Growth Action, and the Congress for New Urbanism.

I am grateful to Chairman DeFazio and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for including the language from Build More Housing Near Transit in last year's HR 2, and I hope it will be included again this year.

Secondly, we need to make substantial investment in the Amtrak system to make it a viable and enticing public transportation option outside of its most popular route, the Northeast Corridor. The second busiest intercity rail corridor in the nation, the LOSSAN corridor, begins in San Diego. It carries \$1 billion worth of goods and 8 million passengers a year, and ensures critical military access as a designated Strategic Rail Corridor Network.

The corridor is vital to our regional, state, national, and international economies, yet, portions of the corridor are literally falling into the ocean. The tracks run across the Del Mar Bluffs, which as recently as last month had another portion collapse into the sea. This latest collapse occurred within 35 feet of the tracks that carry passengers and freight multiple times a day. Trains are now directed to traverse this area at a reduced speed – these are not sustainable conditions, to put it mildly.

While we see routine major investments in the Northeast Corridor, commensurate funding is lacking for the nation's second busiest intercity corridor. I'm hopeful that President Biden's recently proposed \$80 billion plan for Amtrak will include a significant, transformative investment in the San Diego to Los Angeles routing. In my district, the Amtrak largely runs parallel with Interstate 5, the main freeway that runs north-south from Mexico to Canada. Riding the Amtrak provides a beautiful view of the Pacific Ocean, comfortable seating, and WiFi. Taking the train should be an obvious and enticing option for avoiding gridlock on the 5, but because there has been so little investment in upgrading service, a trip from San Diego to Los Angeles on Amtrak takes over three hours, versus two hours in a car. It's no surprise the 5 freeway remains packed at all times of the day – there isn't a viable other option.

With additional funding to improve service and travel times between San Diego and Los Angeles, Amtrak could remake the way Southern Californians commute and travel, and I urge the Committee to think beyond the Northeast Corridor for future investments. It is past time.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these matters. I look forward to continuing to work with you on these and other issues, and I yield back the balance of my time.